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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General says problems faced by women lie at heart of global agenda; until women's rights and full potential achieved, enduring solutions unlikely to world's most serious problems.

+ World Summit for Social Development marks International Women's Day in special observance.

+ Special Representative Yasushi Akashi expresses concern about increasing cease-fire violations in Croatia; says both sides preparing for possible resumption of fighting.

+ Appeal for aid to help establish independent, impartial justice system in Rwanda, made by High Commissioner for Human Rights.

+ Human Rights Commission adopts 33 resolutions and decisions; acts on Decade of Indigenous People and minority rights.

+ FAO launches new initiatives to facilitate dialogue among governments and industry on sustainable development and conservation of forests.

+ Administrative and Budgetary Committee considers redeployment of resources from anti-apartheid activities.

+ Government experts meet in Iceland to review global plan to protect marine environment from land-based activities.

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The problems faced by women worldwide lie at the heart of the global agenda, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Wednesday. In a message to mark International Women's Day, the Secretary-General said until the rights and full potential of women were achieved, enduring solutions to many of the world's most serious social, economic and political problems were unlikely. Efforts to improve the lives of women, in many cases offer the most immediately efficacious means of changing entire societies for the better.

(more)

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At the United Nations, the promotion and protection of women's rights were central objectives, the Secretary-General said. He outlined three targets of his Strategic Plan of Action for the Improvement of the Status of Women, from 1995 to 2000: an overall level of 35 percent women by 1995; 25 percent women at the senior level by 1997; and an overall level of 50 percent -- complete gender equality -- by the year 2000. The Strategy was also part of a comprehensive approach to human resources, calling for major changes in the management culture, the system of appraisal and accountability, and in recruitment and promotion.

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The World Summit for Social Development observed International Women's Day by focusing on Gender Perspective: enhancing the participation of women in social progress and development. International Women's Day was proclaimed in Copenhagen in 1910 and a series of events by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations were held in the city to highlight the historic occasion.

In his address to the Session Wednesday, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said poverty could not be eliminated, productive employment could not be expanded and social integration could not be achieved unless women, participated wholly and equitably in social development.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, the First Lady of the United States, announced a new initiative to expand girls and women's education in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The United States will allocate $100 million over a 10 year period to increase by 20 percent, girl's primary school completion rates, or the number of women who are functionally literate in the project areas. Mrs. Clinton said a key element of the initiative was that women, guided by non governmental organizations, would lead the effort. She urged other governments to join the United States in creating or expanding opportunities for women worldwide.

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Special Representative Yasushi Akashi expressed concern Wednesday about the rising number of cease-fire violations in Croatia. Mr. Akashi said many of the violations appeared to be defensive, reflecting the climate of uncertainty over the expiry of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) mandate on 31 March. However, even defensive preparations could rapidly escalate, putting at risk not only the 29 March 1994 Cease-fire Agreement, but also undermining the Economic Agreement of 2 December, he said.

The Croatian Army and Croatian Serb military forces, especially in the Zone of Separation had hindered the ability of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to fulfil its responsibilities, Mr. Akashi said. Both sides had restricted UN personnel's movements, which impeded their monitoring capability, and violated the Cease-fire Agreement. It was clear the forces on both sides of the Zone of Separation were deepening their defensive positions in preparation for the possibility of resumed fighting.

(more)

Mr. Akashi called on the Croatian Government and the Serb authorities in Knin to exercise the utmost restraint and renew their commitment to the Cease-fire Agreement. He stressed that the consequences of failing to do so, could be incalculable for both Croatia and the region.

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The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, called Wednesday for Governments to make funds quickly available to re-establish the system of justice in Rwanda. In an urgent appeal for aid, Mr. Lasso said the Rwandan people had been working towards reconciliation, but assistance from the international community to support an independent and impartial justice system was indispensable if the process was to continue.

The High Commissioner's field operation in Rwanda has been working with the Rwandan Minister of Justice to help establish an effective justice system. The programme recruits and deploys judges, investigators, prosecutors and defence attorneys and provides infrastructure support to improve prison conditions. It also provides urgently needed assistance to help the Rwandan Government to process quickly and fairly the cases of people accused of human rights violations, including acts of genocide.

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More than 40 ministers and high-level forestry officials will meet on 16 and 17 March in Rome to discuss the conservation and sustainable development of forests. In the first global meeting of its type, the ministers are expected to adopt the "Rome forestry commitment", a reaffirmation to ensure the world's forests are conserved, managed and used in a sustainable manner. The meeting is sponsored by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

Director-General Jacques Diouf said the FAO must facilitate a broader partnership among governments, non-governmental organizations and the private forest industry at national and global levels. In another first, the agency met Wednesday with executives from private forest industries. They play a major role in increasing the value of forests and have been introducing forest management and environmentally friendly processing that contribute directly to sustainability. The FAO will also seek the advice of 24 non-governmental organizations from around the world at a meeting in Rome on 10 and 11 March.

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The Commission on Human Rights has called on the international community to reject the use of unilateral coercive measures, which were in clear contradiction of international law, against developing countries. The resolution, which was adopted by a roll call vote of 24 in favour to 17 against, with 12 abstentions called on the Secretary-General to submit a report on such measures. The United States said the text had no place in the Commission, as it dealt with commercial relations between States and was not a resolution on human rights.

(more)

In earlier action, the Commission agreed on a final programme of activities for 1995 for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and asked governments to give consideration to the final comprehensive Programme of Action of the Decade. It also recommended that the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities establish a working group to promote minority rights.

The Commission also endorsed a workshop, to be held later this year, on the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples in the United Nations system. A resolution concerning traffic in women and girls, called on governments to prevent the misuse and exploitation of women in the tourism development and in the export of labour. It also called on States to review their national legislation on public emergencies.

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The Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) yesterday considered revised programme budget estimates which would redeploy nearly $3.25 million, out of a total of $5.7 million no longer required for anti-apartheid activities. The General Assembly has already approved the redeployment of resources totalling more than $1.4 million.

The funds had been allocated under budget sections concerning policy-making organs, the elimination of apartheid and public information. Under the revised estimates, portions of the funds would be redeployed to cover activities relating to political affairs, peace-keeping, policy coordination and sustainable development, public information and the Economic Commission of Africa.

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Government experts gathered in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik this week to deliberate on a draft global programme of action to protect the marine environment from land-based activities. The meeting, whic is organized by the United Nations Environment Protection (UNEP) will focus on conservation of the oceans. The draft programme classifies areas of concern, establishes priorities and defines strategies and programmes to take advantage of new global initiatives in marine conservation. Most importantly, it recognizes significant additional areas of concern, including the development of international law to focus on preventive action, and development and promotion of innovative management approaches.

Elizabeth Dowdeswell, UNEP's Executive Director, told the meeting approaches to deal with marine pollution from land-based activities. Approaches should consist of a comprehensive mix of political, social, economic, managerial, technical, scientific, legal and institutional measures. She called for strengthening partnerships and close involvement of all stakeholders to ensure the success of the wide-ranging programme of action.

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